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ABSTRACT

Although there has been a reluctance in the past on the part of journalism educators to criticize the news media openly, evidence now exists indicating that attempts to assess the performance of the press are taking place in the classroom, in the community, and within the media itself. Contents of this AEJ monograph include "The Journalism Educator as Critic: His Contribution, Concern and Competence" by Herbert Strentz, which discusses the role of the journalism educator as press critic and outlines ways of accomplishing a thorough assessment of the media; "Media Criticism in Classroom and Community" by Kenneth Stark, which examines the strengths of the educator-critic and argues the need for scholarly criticism of the media; and "Criticism of the Media, With the Media" by David L. Anderson and Loren Ghiglione, which points out that while criticism has not been impressive in the past, the role of the critic appears to be evolving to a point where it will be institutionalized within journalism education and associated national organizations. (RB)

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# journalism monographs

NUMBER THIRTY-TWO

HERBERT STRENTZ, KENNETH STARCK, DAVID L. ANDERSON and LOREN GHIGLIONE

*The Critical Factor: Criticism of the News Media in Journalism Education*

FEBRUARY 1974

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HERBERT STRENTZ, KENNETH STARCK,
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# *The Critical Factor: Criticism of the News Media in Journalism Education*

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# Preface

Journalism educators appear to have been awakening in recent years to the need for systematic and continuing criticism of the news media. It was not always thus. In 1959, in his presidential address to the Association for Education in Journalism, Theodore B. Peterson commented:

> From time to time over the years, a few lonely souls have called upon schools of journalism to carry on a continuing program of criticism of the press . . . Such reminders have hit journalism educators with all the force of a wife's reminder to her husband that it's time they leave a party—widely spaced, wistful and unheeded.

At the 1972 convention the mood was different. The principal focus of the proceedings was on news media criticism. Sessions were devoted to the uses of scholarship in the appraisal of media performance, others to what educators can do to help citizens who challenge the renewal of station licenses, still others to the involvement of faculty in the establishment of press councils. These and other convention activities suggested a new awareness by journalism educators of what this monograph calls "the critical factor."

Criticism of the media is implicit in journalism teaching, from instruction in writing news leads to the expression of professional and scholarly concerns regarding the status of the media in society. If there has been an awakening of journalism educators to the need for such criticism only now, that is an indictment of journalism education as it has existed in the past.

Media criticism—informed or uninformed—is a pervasive feature of American society. The educator, both as a citizen and as a scholar, has a contribution to make to the dialogue. What that is and could become is what this monograph is about.

# The Journalism Educator as Critic: His Contribution, Concern and Competence

By Herbert Strentz

Tradition has it that the news media most often respond to criticism with damnation of the ill-informed critic, alarums about threats to freedom of the press and a few bouquets tossed at themselves for their unstinting fight for the public's right to know. If this is truth, it is a marvel that the media are ever sufficiently settled to publish a readable newspaper or to air a coherent newscast.

Yet here we are once more contemplating the nature of the news media and the roles of its critics, specifically the role of journalism educators. And this is as it should be, now and in 5, 10 and 20 years. The need for appraisal of the media is continuous. Satisfactory performance by today's standards may be unsatisfactory five to ten years from now as society and its media change. Futher, those problems and concerns central to the human condition are the problems and concerns which constantly need attention because of their recurring nature and significance.

Sociologist Robert Park said as much 50 years ago:

> What then is the remedy for the existing condition of the newspapers? There is no remedy. Humanly speaking, the present newspapers are about as good as they can be. If the newspapers are to be improved, it will come through the education of the people and the organization of political information and intelligence.[1]

Not surprisingly, newsmen do not necessarily agree.[2]

[1] "The Natural History of the Newspaper," *The American Journal of Sociology*, 29:289.

[2] Richard L. Harwood, "Press Criticism: Who Needs It?," *The Bulletin of the American Society of Newspaper Editors* (February 1972), p. 11.

*Definitions and Points of Departure*

It seems prudent, for the purposes of this monograph, to restrict the use of the term *news media* to the professional purveyors of information in our society, chiefly the daily and weekly press, the wire services, including those of the major newspapers, and network and local broadcast news.

For the definition of *criticism* of these media, we turn, as did Jay W. Jensen and Theodore Peterson, to a dictionary: "The art of judging with knowledge and propriety the beauties and faults of works of art or literature; hence, similar consideration of moral and logical values." To this Jensen added, "and institutions, or human conduct in general."[3]

Such a definition emphasizes that criticism should point to strengths as well as weaknesses and recognizes the need to know something about the subject under criticism. It also suggests the critical posture which journalism educators might well develop in their students, neither yielding to facile and glib detraction such as "everyone knows you can't believe *The Herald*," nor pretending that establishing standards for evaluating media performance is easy. Yet without such standards the media critic is without anchor.

The codes and standards of professional journalism associations and the statements of purpose found in many newspapers and in the license applications of local television stations, although couched in generalities, do recognize such concepts as "accuracy," "fair play" and "public service." But it remains to spell out what is meant by "accuracy" and then to see how well the media measure up.

At this point, the critic faces the still more difficult task of relating media performance to the requirements of society at large. Here the journalism educator may offer insight and perspective not always available in the newsroom or in other forums of media criticism. Jensen and Bruce Westley have discussed the challenges and opportunities facing the educator-critic.

Jensen argued for media criticism which would be far removed from knee-jerk damnations of easily recognized follies. Scholarly criticism should be conducted, he said, "with due regard for the

[3] "A Method and Perspective for Criticism of the Mass Media," *Journalism Quarterly*, 37:262 (Spring 1960).

influence of political, social and cultural forces in their historical development; and . . . with due regard for the contextual relationships of the media with their environment—with the demands, the values, the aspirations and life interests of the society in which they exist."[4]

Westley wrote:

> . . . if the teacher has a special opportunity to shape the normative atmosphere of the profession, it is as a researcher that he has his most powerful and most nearly unique weapons. It is not his membership in the professional culture that gives the teacher-scholar his authority to speak out on professional issues . . . As an educator he has trained himself to view things in wider perspective—to look at phenomena in the stream of history or as a special case of human behavior; to see a new medium in the context of the larger society and its informational requirements . . . (It) is his general theoretical knowledge and the tools with which to extend that knowledge that gives the educator-scholar authority.[5]

Curtis D. MacDougall puts more emphasis on professional skills. MacDougall has long equated "reporting" with "research," and in doctoral dissertations written under his direction at Northwestern, students were encouraged to analyze press performance primarily through in-depth, investigative reporting, matching their findings against those reported by the news media.[6]

Rather than being sources of conflict, however, the approaches suggested by Westley and MacDougall should point to the varying avenues of research open to journalism educators. There is disagreement about methodology and it is often quite heated but there is no dispute about the need for journalism educators to be critics of the news media and the need to give that criticism social perspective. MacDougall noted 27 years ago that journalism professors

[4] *Ibid.*, p. 263.

[5] Westley, with Warren C. Price, "The Role of AEJ as Watchdog of Media Performance." Unpublished paper presented to Association for Education in Journalism, University of Iowa, August 30, 1966, p. 4.

[6] Three examples: Chicago Newspapers Coverage of the City's Major Civil Disorders of 1968 by James A. Flanery, Ph.D., 1971; Benjamin C. Wills and the Chicago Press by Thomas F. Koerner, Ph.D., 1968; and The Role of the Chicago Daily Newspapers in the Selection of the Chicago Campus for the University of Illinois, Gene A. Burd, Ph.D., 1964.

. . . have an obligation to our students as citizens, to society as a whole and, selfishly, to ourselves. We are social scientists whose focus of interest is journalism. We possess a scholar's perspective and study the newspapers, magazine, radio and advertising as social institutions . . . (P)rofessors of journalism have brains too (and) their opinions about newspapers and other journalistic media are just as good as those of a historian . . . or of a professor of economics (when commenting on their fields of expertise) . . .[7]

The academic setting offers interdisciplinary skills and interests not readily available to most other forums. Law, political science, sociology, economics and other disciplines can bring to media criticism resources and dimensions largely unavailable outside the University. If such criticism is to be systematic and sensitive to the events of the day and if it is to be periodically reexamined it must be fully shared with those who work in the media and who comprise the audience. Vehicles of media commentary such as *The Bulletin* of the American Society of Newspaper Editors and the *Quill* of the Society of Professional Journalists (Sigma Delta Chi) address themselves primarily to people within the media. In journalism education, there is opportunity to address criticism of the media to its future practitioners; but the opportunity is there to reach the audience and thereby seek the reforms and improvements that only public knowledge can bring about.

Thus the role of the media critic is inseparable from the usual university goals of teaching, research and community service. If the critical function is shared with the students, it offers increased awareness of the needs and problems of the profession. If shared with the public, it offers opportunity for increasing awareness of and sensitivity to the functions and responsibilities of the news media and it nurtures appreciation of freedom of speech and press as individual and corporate rights. If shared with colleagues it promotes significant academic research.

Further, scholarly criticism sharpens the differences between training for a vocation or trade and educating for a profession. One attribute of a profession is a high degree of generalized and systematized knowledge. Such a body of knowledge suggests the need for professional schools whose functions necessarily include

[7] "What Newspaper Publishers Should Know About Professors of Journalism," *Journalism Quarterly*, 24:5 (March 1947).

criticism of the profession. Discussing relationships between professions and professional schools, Bernard Barber has written:

The staff of the university professional school are often the leaders in the continual codification and improvement of standards of ethics for practicing professionals. They criticize, sometimes within professional circles and sometimes in public, inadequacy and deviation among practicing professionals. This criticism is the more powerful when it is based on careful research of the kind that university professionals are able to carry out. But more than negative means, in the form of criticism, is available to them. University members are often responsible for the award to practicing professionals of a variety of as for intellectual achievement in the profession. In these several medals, prizes and other honors for high standards of ethics a. well ways, the university professional school is a moral watchdog for its profession.[8]

*A Silent Vigil?*

In his 1947 address to the American Association of Schools and Departments of Journalism, Paul Lazarsfeld called attention to what he felt was a lack of a tradition of news media criticism.

. . . (C)riticism of the mass media is not recognized as a formal and legitimate field of intellectual endeavor . . . (C)ritics are suspect: they are thought of usually either as a person airing a pet peeve or selling a pet scheme.[9]

In the 1930s journalism educators well recognized the sensitivity of the press to criticism. Perhaps views on press criticism were accurately expressed in the 1933 presidential address of Ralph L. Crossman of the University of Colorado to the American Association of Teachers of Journalism.

We should occasionally voice our criticisms and suggestions, not in the spirit of carping critics, but as guides, philosophers and friends; not to the public, to the injury of the newspaper, but to the papers themselves, "within the family." . . . Activity in this direction should be by our associations not by individual schools. . . . It is human to

[8] "Some Problems in the Sociology of the Professions," *Daedalus* 92, No. 4 (Fall 1963), p. 675.

[9] "The Role of Criticism in the Management of the Mass Media," *Journalism Quarterly*, 25:115 (June 1948).

resent criticism even when it comes from our best friends. We can function this way as an association, however, without giving offense.[10]

Crossman did suggest the need for a permanent committee to allow journalism educators to regularly review and annually report on the ethics of American journalism.[11] There is, however, little evidence that anything resulted from his suggestion. Failing to rouse the association, and obviously ignoring his own advice, Crossman became one of the more outspoken media critics of his time.

Given the nature of those relations, it is understandable that a tradition of criticism did not emerge with the first schools and departments of journalism. Early emphasis, at least into the 1930s, was placed on curriculum and developing working relationships with the media in order to better understand employment needs and better educate students.[12]

Besides, the tone of much of the press criticism in the pre-World War II years was harsh, sometimes shrill. Silas Bent in *Ballyhoo* (1927), Upton Sinclair in *The Brass Check* (1919) and George Seldes in his several books may have alerted some journalism educators to the problems involved in raising criticisms without giving offense.

Even Willard G. Bleyer, not known for his timidity, wrote in 1928: "It is easy to be satirical about inane comics, pink and green pages of sporting 'dope,' trashy serial fiction and the sensationalism of a few tabloids."[13] Of greater concern was the need for the journalism profession to get its own house in order: The "greatest weakness of journalism as a profession," he wrote, "is the lack of local, state and national organizations of the rank and file of newspaper writers and editors . . ."[14] A newspaper organization akin to the American Medical Association or the bar associations was suggested as a means of strengthening the profession. Five

[10] "Responsibilities to Students and Press," *Journalism Quarterly*, 11:9-10 (March 1934).

[11] *Ibid.*, p. 11.

[12] For example, see A. S. Wills, "Cooperation of the Press with Schools," *Journalism Quarterly*, 2:4:13-17 (August 1926), and William L. Rivers, "The Journalism Schools," *Change* (March/April 1971), pp. 56-61.

[13] "The Greatest Weakness," *Journalism Quarterly*, 4:15 (January 1928), p. 15.

[14] *Ibid.*

years later, surveying the early years of the depression and the impacts of the National Recovery Act, Bleyer again commented upon prospects for organizing the rank and file.

> Whether or not the organization of rank and file of newspaper men and women will lead to the establishment of standards for admission to the profession . . . remains to be seen. Such requirements would not only protect newspaper workers but would elevate greatly the status of the profession.[15]

In an interim article, "What Schools of Journalism are Trying to Do" (1931), Bleyer wrote of the purposes and values of a journalism education. The article gives evidence that efforts to reform the media were made through education of students and concern with the status of the profession.[16] A tradition of criticism had not developed, but concern with the profession and educational values certainly had.[17]

Four years later, Kenneth Olson reflected on the broadening scope of journalism education:

> As a student I used to rail . . . for "brass tack" technical courses against the impracticability of courses in the ethics of journalism. But I think today we have need of a new emphasis on the ethics of our profession, on the function of the press and the relationship between the press and public opinion.[18]

[15] "Journalism in the United States," *Journalism Quarterly*, 10:300-1 (December 1933).

[16] *Journalism Quarterly*, 8:35-44 (March 1931).

[17] H. L. Mencken, in what must have been one of his mellower moments, assayed the new schools of journalism and their potential impact, (as noted in *Journalism Quarterly*, 2:2:3): "The old time city room in truth was a poor school . . . It was full of pleasant fellows, but the majority of them were bad journalists, for what they mistook for professional knowledge was simply a huge accumulation of useless facts . . . There was little professional spirit in the newsroom . . . I believe the new schools of journalism have changed all that. Many of them, to be sure, are still in a primitive stage and some are still staffed by obvious incompetents, but in the best of them there are very good teachers and these teachers are turning out graduates with a lively sense of the essential dignity of journalism . . . (S)oon or later the youngsters will get on top. When they do so there will be an immense improvement in American journalism."

[18] "The Newspaper in Times of Social Change," *Journalism Quarterly*, 12:18 (March 1935).

Some familiar names in scholarly assessment of the media do begin to appear in the 1930s, among them—Chilton R. Bush, Mitchell Charnley, Ralph Casey, Curtis MacDougall and Sidney Kobre.

*From the Outside*

Nevertheless, it remained for a critical endeavor outside the realm of journalism education—and intentionally without the membership of journalism educators—to outrage the media, primarily the newspapers. *A Free and Responsible Press,* the report of the Commission on Freedom of the Press, issued in 1947, drew hostile press reaction on at least three counts. First, the report, financed by Time, Inc., and the Encyclopedia Britannica, recommended "the establishment of a new and independent agency to appraise and report annually upon the performance of the press." Second, the Commission recommended government supported "yardstick" media. Both were seen as threats to First Amendment freedoms. Third, the commission itself, while rich in intellectual and philosophical resources, did not include a single person with news experience. Thus, many journalists and educators argued, the commission did not know what it was talking about.

The third shortcoming was noted in a review of the commission's report, *A Free and Responsible Press,* in *Journalism Quarterly.* William O. Trapp of Columbia University likened the commission's first published report to "a not so well-bred composite Letter to the Editor, with the usual threat or warning that freedom of the press is in danger unless the press reforms itself."[19] He added that studies suggested by the commission would take years to complete, but when completed "would be valuable material for research by university chancellors, presidents and professors."[20]

Another book which resulted from the deliberations of the commission and its recommendations fared better in a second *Journalism Quarterly* review. The book was *Freedom of the Press* by William Ernest Hocking, a member of the commission and emeritus professor of philosophy at Harvard. In his review of that book MacDougall reported:

[19] *Journalism Quarterly,* 24:160 (March 1947).
[20] *Ibid.,* 24:161.

With this book, the commission . . . regains some of the reputation it lost because of its superficial predecessor [*A Free and Responsible Press*] . . . Hocking . . . does what the authors of the previous volume should have done: he supports his conclusions with evidence. In this case that evidence consists in logical argument.[21]

The "logical argument" led to the need for some form of media review:

The work of the press is clothed with a public interest and [quoting Hocking] "protection of the freedom of the issuer is no longer sufficient to protect automatically either the consumer or the community. The general policy of laissez faire in this field must be reconsidered."[22]

Despite the less than laudatory reception accorded the Report of the Commission on Freedom of the Press, the 1947 convention of the AATJ, predecessor to the AEJ, meeting in Philadelphia, resolved that:

"the president of the American Association of Teachers of Journalism appoint a committee to study measures that can be taken by the association to evaluate the performance of communications agencies during 1948 and succeeding years and that it consider in some detail what contribution can be made in this direction by the Association."[23]

But that resolution, like Professor Crossman's suggestion 14 years before, seems to have been forgotten soon after its adoption. It was not until 18 years later, in the middle and late 1960s, that the official records of the AEJ conventions began to reflect concern with media evaluation.

In convention resolutions, through the work of the Standing Committee on Professional Freedom and Responsibility and in convention programs, the AEJ resumed at least lip service to the role of the journalism educator as press critic and the idea of an independent agency to evaluate press performance. In an ambitious resolution, adopted in 1970, it was resolved that the AEJ

establish a Journalism Center for the overall task of assessing the relationship between mass communication and society, with particular regard to these points: *a)* what kinds of information does society need

[21] *Journalism Quarterly*, 24:267-8 (September 1947).

[22] *Ibid.*

[23] Convention proceedings, *Journalism Quarterly*, 25:100 (March 1948).

that it is not getting, *b)* what conditions affect free, responsible gathering and dissemination of such information; and *c)* what means are available for insuring that such needed information will be obtained and disseminated.[24]

At this writing the center has not been established. Instead, attention has shifted to the proposal of the Twentieth Century Fund Task Force recommendation for a national Council on Press Responsibility and Press Freedom "to receive, to examine, and to report on complaints concerning the accuracy and fairness of news coverage in the United States as well as to study, and to report on issues involving freedom of the press."[25]

Unlike the Commission on Freedom of the Press, the Twentieth Century Fund Task Force, established in 1972, did include several professional newsmen. But, as in the case of the Commission, there was no journalism educator on the panel. Appointed in May 1973, its 15-member National News Council includes six news media representatives and a law dean (but no journalism dean).

*Unable and Incompetent*

The absence of journalism educators from such panels may be a sign of what Lazarsfeld saw as the absence of a tradition of criticism. But on a less abstract level, and in regard to day-to-day criticism of the media as well as the more imposing studies by commissions and task forces, journalism educators often have been considered unable or incompetent to engage in such criticism, whether because of their close ties with the profession of journalism or the fear of retaliation if they criticized the media. Writing of the need to rely on the media for funds and for data, Lazarsfeld wrote:

> We academic people always have a certain sense of tightrope walking: at what point will the commercial partners find some necessary conclusion too hard to take and at what point will they shut us off from the indispensable sources of funds and data.[26]

[24] Official Report of the 1970 Convention, Association for Education in Journalism, *Journalism Quarterly*, 47:825 (Winter 1970).

[25] "Monitoring National News Suppliers," *Columbia Journalism Review*, p. 45 (March/April 1973).

[26] *Op. cit.*, p. 116.

Press critic Ben Bagdikian observed that schools of journalism could routinely assess media performance in their locales:

> But they won't because it would make the publishers angry. The publishers would go to the state legislature and say, "Are you feeding milk to this viper in our nest?" So the schools of journalism . . . are under a great deal of pressure not to make their publishers angry.[27]

Melvin Mencher of Columbia University's Graduate School of Journalism has cited such pressures among many factors contributing to reluctance to criticize:

> . . . (W)e see at work on the teacher his weariness with the working press, which includes the feeling that no criticism will improve it; his need to be accepted by campus peers; cronyism with the profession; and the pressure to play at public relations for the department and the university.[28]

Besides, there is the popular view that journalism educators are incompetent to criticize the media because their research is oriented toward subject matter irrelevant to media performance. Such research now dominates journalism education, it is argued, and the content of *Journalism Quarterly* is cited as evidence. The argument is that research abstract enough to be acceptable to scholars is usually far removed from issues related to media performance. But there really was no outpouring of media criticism before the schools began emphasizing quantitative and theoretical studies. Further, the record of AEJ conventions is evidence that there has been increasing concern over the need for media criticism. Yet this has led to no apparent decline in media support of the schools.

And, although journalism educators did not serve on either the Commission on Freedom of the Press or the Twentieth Century Fund Task Force, they and their students have con-

[27] "The Hutchins Commission Revisited," a program of the Mass Communications and Society Division of the Association for Education in Journalism, University of Colorado, August 30, 1967, pp. 18-19.

[28] "A Failure of Nerve and Verve" in "Criticisms of the Media in Journalism Education." Unpublished paper presented to Association for Education in Journalism, Southern Illinois University, August 22, 1972, p. 18. See also *Nieman Reports* (December 1972/March 1973), pp. 18-22.

tributed to the reports of The National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence, the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders and, most recently, the Surgeon General's Report on Television and Social Behavior.

Perhaps the viable test for a tradition of media criticism is just ahead. Perhaps AEJ will once again fail to follow through on its latest resolution to press for media criticism. But the trends in journalism education, as reflected in convention discussions, in the classroom, in the community and in closer working relationships with the news media, all suggest the contrary: that journalism educators are increasingly aware of the challenges and opportunities in media criticism.

The sections of this monograph that follow offer insight into the current state of the art as well as the responsibilities facing the scholar-critic. The theme might be taken from Jensen:

> Journalism, properly practised, is a great calling. In asking that schools of journalism undertake the role of critics of the media, and undertake it in a manner appropriate to their place in a university, I am asking no more than I—or any of you—would ask of the journalist who accepts the critical function as inherent in his profession.[29]

[29] Jensen, *op. cit.*, p. 266.

# Media Criticism in Classroom and Community

By Kenneth Starck

Now more than ever before journalism educators and their students seem to be responding, just as some of the media are, to the increasing demands of society and to the sobering demands of professional responsibility.[1] In one way, it is nothing new. The good teacher knows the role of classroom criticism in achieving high standards of performance, and the good student is aware of the value of constructive criticism, in the process becoming more critical of his own work and that of others. What seems to be new is the vigor of active criticism and the acknowledgement that criticism should be a part of every journalism program.

Theodore B. Peterson said it more than 14 years ago:

> If we fail to imbue our students with a critical spirit, if we simply yield to the common notion that we should indoctrinate our students in the glories of the press, then I cannot see that we have advanced beyond the days of the apprentice system, nor can I see that the instruction of journalism is worthy of a place in a university.[2]

The purpose of this section is to recount some of the methods being used to develop a critical spirit among students in journalism programs across the country.

[1] See "Criticisms of the Media in Journalism Education." Collection of unpublished papers prepared by the teaching Committee of the Mass Communication and Society Division for the annual convention of the Association for Education in Journalism, Carbondale, Illinois, August 1972.

[2] "The Role of the School of Journalism as Critic of the Mass Media." Unpublished paper presented to Association for Education in Journalism, University of Oregon, August 27, 1959.

*In the Classroom*

A 1972 survey of Mass Communications and Society courses indicated that two of the ten most frequent categories of course content dealt with "mass media from the consumer's standpoint" and "major criticisms of mass media." The results indicated that one important area of emphasis was on "judging press performance and developing ways to ascertain needed improvements."[3] But no longer is the student content with familiarizing himself with the critical efforts of others and devising defensive strategies. Now he is an active inquirer in the process. This new spirit is reflective of an educational philosophy which sees the purpose of education, in the words of a popular book on teaching, as helping "all students develop built-in, shockproof crap detectors as basic equipment in their survival kits."[4]

The illustrations that follow are primarily from the writer's own classroom experience, from the experience of other educators and from editors concerned with the need for systematic surveillance of the performance of their own staffs.

*Accuracy Checks.* A number of newspapers today periodically conduct accuracy checks by clipping items from the newspaper and sending them, along with a questionnaire, to the original news sources. The completed questionnaire provides a check on reporter performance and offers some insight as to what sources regard as errors and how these differ from those of newsmen.[5] Objective errors, such as misspellings or incorrect factual information, can be identified fairly easily and remedied. Subjective errors are harder to deal with. Meetings between reporters, editors and sources might explore the basis of differing judgments.

[3] Harry H. Griggs, "A Report Describing Introductory, Upper Division and Graduate Courses in the General Subject Area 'Mass Communications and Society' at Institutions with ACEJ Accredited Programs" (unpublished), 1972. Unless otherwise noted, quotations from and references to course outlines cited here are from this mimeographed report.

[4] Neil Postman and Charles Weingartner, *Teaching as a Subversive Activity* (New York: Dell Publishing Company, Inc. 1969), p. 218.

[5] For a discussion of newspaper accuracy findings and references, see T. Joseph Scanlon, "A New Approach to Study of Newspaper Accuracy," *Journalism Quarterly*, 49:587-90 (Autumn 1972), and Gerald L. Grotta, "Attitudes on Newspaper Accuracy and External Controls," *Journalism Quarterly*, 46:757-9 (Winter 1969).

*Evaluating Press Performance.* In a course outline designed to take advantage of the 1972 elections, David M. Rubin, in a class on Mass Media and Government, asked his students to prepare a report evaluating media coverage of a Presidential candidate of the student's choice. Students were to monitor newspapers and broadcast stations to determine how much space and time was being devoted to his candidate, what sorts of events were being covered and not covered, whether the information provided was sufficient to permit an intelligent voting decision and whether any bias was detectable in the coverage.

At all levels of journalism instruction some more or less standardized methods of investigation can be employed in evaluating media performance. Content analysis, a technique useful for descriptive purposes, can answer practical questions such as amount of coverage devoted to certain topics or extent of "enterprise" reporting.[6] At a more sophisticated level, content analysis can be used to measure possible bias in the news columns or handling of a particular story. Opinion studies, employing techniques varying from in-depth interviews to highly structured questionnaires and to such instruments as the semantic differential and Q methodology, provide means for students to determine audience reaction to media performance and output.[7]

In a course titled "The Mass Media, Society and Basic Issues," Peter M. Sandman at Ohio State University asks his students to identify a problem area in media practice and then suggest a solution in the form of a "rule." The outline reads in part:

> Describe the way things are done now (as opposed to the way your rule would have them done). This should be based either on library research, or on content analysis, or on interviews and correspondence, or on some combination (of these). Having described current practice,

[6] A practical book on the uses and methods of content analysis is Richard W. Rudd, Robert K. Thorp and Lewis Donohew, *Content Analysis of Communications* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1967).

[7] Especially useful among books on research methodology are Philip Emmert and William D. Brooks, eds., *Methods of Research in Communication* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1970); Fred N. Kerlinger, *Foundations of Behavioral Research* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 2nd Ed. 1973); Charles H. Backstrom and Gerald D. Hursh, *Survey Research* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1963); and Eugene J. Webb., *et al., Unobtrusive Measures* (Chicago: Rand McNally and Company, 1966).

you must now describe what is *wrong* with current practice, why it needs a solution . . . Now restate your rule and show how it will help solve the problem you have outlined.

Many of these courses are not limited to journalism majors. Students from all parts of the campus appear to be electing broad-based mass media and society courses and, in the process, are becoming more informed and critical consumers of the mass media.

Several different approaches might be brought to bear on a single problem. At Southern Illinois University in the spring of 1970, when many schools closed doors early owing to student unrest, a faculty committee was named to evaluate the performance of the university newspaper during the campus disorders. Graduate and undergraduate students utilized content analysis, structured interviews with news sources and open-ended interviews with student staff members. The results, which generated discussion across the campus, rated the newspaper's coverage as excellent but found an "apparent failure to explore causes leading up to the disorders and to try to place them into a meaningful perspective." It was reasoned that if campus press performance reflects the same strengths and weaknesses as the commercial press, "then there would seem to be important implications for journalism education. Surely preparing journalists means more than outfitting a young recruit for a lateral movement from the campus to the commercial press."[8]

*Press Councils.* Though the concept is not new, tracing its origins to Sweden in 1916, it is only in recent years that the press council idea has gained widespread support. The impetus came in this country with the bold plan of the Mellett Fund for a Free and Responsible Press to establish several experimental community press councils beginning in 1967.[9] The idea caught on in a num-

[8] Starck, "Campus Press Performance in Coverage of Disorders," *Journalism Quarterly*, 48:751-5 (Winter 1971).

[9] See Rivers, *et al., Backtalk: Press Councils in America* (San Francisco: Canfield Press, 1972) for the most comprehensive report of the Mellett Fund projects and press councils in the United States. In addition, see *A Free and Responsible Press* (New York: The Twentieth Century Fund, 1973); L. Erwin Atwood and Kenneth Starck, "Effects of Community Press Councils: Real and Imagined," *Journalism Quarterly*, 49:230-38 (Summer 1972), and a series of articles titled "Birth of a Media Council," *Columbia Journalism Review* (March/April 1973), pp. 43-57.

ber of communities as well as at the state and national levels, and the classroom has picked it up, too. Several campuses, including the University of Florida and Louisiana State University, have established press councils. Florida's Alligator Press Council, set up experimentally in 1970 and consisting of nine students and three faculty members, evoked this response from a student editor:

> Sometimes journalists exist in their own little subculture, believing that they are representative of the whole—in that their ideas and views seem to be unanimous among each other—thus creating an opportunity to generalize. Perhaps they should try to find out what Mr. Average is really thinking . . . Involve people more in their work.[10]

At some institutions mock press council proceedings have been arranged with several classes involved. For example, at the University of South Carolina several classes, including one in a course called Freedom, Responsibility and Ethics of the Mass Media, were organized into press councils for the purpose of evaluating a laboratory newspaper produced by students in an advanced reporting-editing course. The result was an evaluation that went beyond the usual teacher-student assessment of the product.

Graduate students who have worked as professionals and are learning scientific techniques of inquiry may be in an excellent position to make valid inquiries into the media and, with their professors, to probe more complex issues.

At Stanford, William Rivers and a graduate student systematically evaluated Bay Area newspapers and made suggestions for their improvement. Their published suggestions included higher pay to attract better qualified personnel and disentanglement of newspapers from "local Establishments."[11]

In a provocative study of creativity in the newsroom, a graduate student at Boston University examined a Massachusetts daily for "idea" stories, "those that concerned plans and proposals for the future, alternative solutions to problems, suggested goals and novel adaptations to new situations." She found few of them (6.2% of the total column inches devoted to local news) and

[10] Jean Chance, "Diary of a Press Council Member . . ." *The Quill* (November 1971), pp. 22-3.

[11] *A Region's Press: Anatomy of Newspapers in the San Francisco Bay Area* (University of California: Institute of Governmental Studies, 1971).

suggested the newspaper reevaluate its concept of what is news.[12]

In a Communication Research Methods class at the University of South Carolina, students wondered how views of the role of the newspaper in society differed. On the basis of role theory, they hypothesized that the consumer would view the role differently than would the producer. They administered a set of opinion statements to nearly 40 persons, including officials of the local newspaper. The audience and the media people saw eye-to-eye fairly well on what the role of the newspaper in the community should be—but not on how that role was being fulfilled.[13]

In a different vein, Elizabeth Yamashita's seminar on Contemporary Issues and the Journalist at Northwestern is concerned with media criticism by "insiders, politicians, social scientists, commissions and the public." A research project inquired how journalists can do a better job of reporting a social "problem" situation, that is, how to meet criticisms from the public that their work is sensational, inaccurate, dull and transitory, how to meet criticisms from social scientists that we are superficial, and how to establish standards of performance for reporting. She suggests an entire class can function as a press council to establish criteria for press evaluation.

*New Frontiers*

The repertoire of approaches and devices that can be used in the classroom to develop a critical perspective toward the media seems at times to be woefully skimpy. In 1971 the Association for Education in Journalism executive committee offered a $500 award for "the most productive examination of mass media performance within the next years." For a whole year, this challenge failed to yield any prototype studies which would have wide application. An award was finally made in 1973.

Journalism students are often encouraged to read from the assortment of regional and national journalism reviews that have sprung up in recent years. At least one institution, the University of Arizona, has established its own journalism review. The *Pre-*

[12] Norma Jane Langford, "Creative Thinking in Newspapers," *Journalism Quarterly*, 46:814-17 (Winter 1969).

[13] Starck, "Defining Perceptions of the Function of the Media: A Proposal for Developing Nations and Changing Societies," *Gazette*, 19:145-54 (1973).

*tentious Idea,* with a student editorial staff. (A newspaper editor unknowingly provided the title when he commented, "What you intend to do is a bit pretentious.") Students can develop journalism reviews of their own. For example, Sigma Delta Chi chapters at the Universities of Kentucky and South Carolina have such reviews on the drawing boards as this is written.

*In the Community*

The critical spirit has been gaining momentum in the community. From such activities as organizing community press councils to carrying out "adversarial" research, some institutions and some professors have applied their expertise to action-type programs designed to bring about improved media performance.

The turning point in journalism education's attitude toward media criticism may well have come in fall of 1967, when Stanford and Southern Illinois Universities, having accepted the challenge of the Mellett Fund for a Free and Responsible Press, each began organizing two experimental community press councils.[14] In trying to generate criticism of the local newspapers, the council directors affiliated with the universities discovered quickly that council members drawn from many walks of life were appallingly ignorant of how the press operates and the problems it faces. After several months during which council members learned much about the press, council discussions began yielding constructive criticism and suggestions for the representatives of the local newspapers. The experience suggests the need for innovative efforts to inform the public of the role of the media to the end that a more critical but informed public will help avoid intervention by the government in media practices.

The University of Minnesota and that state's press association led the nation in setting up the first state-wide press council in 1971.[15] The Minnesota experience suggests a role for journalism schools in helping organize such councils where publishers and

[14] Rivers, *op. cit.* Also see Note 9, *supra.*

[15] C. Donald Peterson, "Press councils: Are They a Wise Step Toward Professional Standards? Here's the Minnesota Story," *Professional Standards,* a report by the APME Professional Standards Committee (November 1972), pp. 55-9; Alfred Balk, "Minnesota Launches a Press Council," *Columbia Journalism Review* (November/December 1971), pp. 22-7.

editors are willing: as an independent agent able to provide the impetus for the establishment and continued functioning of the council.

*Public Policy Making.* A comparatively new area to be entered by the journalism educator is that of public policy making. Adopting the philosophy that mass media are too important to society to be left to the entrepreneur, professors have stepped forward to offer their special knowledge to the public with increasing frequency. One form is consultation with various commissions entrusted with in-depth studies affecting the public and its information media, such as the Walker Report and the Kerner Report.[16] In Milwaukee, Wisconsin, and Carbondale, Illinois, academic expertise has been used to help forge cable television franchises. Other scholars have suggested alternative means of financing public television.[17]

An ambitious project that could serve as a model in the contesting of FCC broadcast license renewals was undertaken by a group composed largely of University of Wisconsin journalism and communications teachers. Calling itself Better Television for Madison (BTM), the group filed a petition with the FCC to deny renewal of a license to Television Wisconsin, Inc., to operate WISC-TV. Through personal interviews with key individuals, analysis of program content, re-interviewing of some respondents in a station-sponsored survey and legal research, BTM presented the FCC a 12-page petition alleging that news and public affairs programming was of poor quality and insufficient quantity.

Labeling their approach "adversary research," the investigators noted:

Neither the rules nor the arena are familiar to most academic researchers, though more are entering the field by choice and necessity. Increasingly scholars will be asked to propose and evaluate social pro-

[16] E.g., "The News Media and the Disorders," *Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders* (New York: A Bantam Book, 1968), pp. 362-89; Robert K. Baker and Sandra J. Ball, *Mass Media and Violence*, A Report to the National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence, Vol. 9 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1969).

[17] E.g., Wilbur Schramm and Lyle Nelson, "Financing Public TV," *Columbia Journalism Review* (January/February 1973), pp. 31-8.

grams. And the scholar as citizen will seek a role in public policy and institutional performance.[18]

Marquette University journalism faculty and graduate and undergraduate students involved residents of the Milwaukee Model Cities program in establishing a newspaper and a press council to serve the specific informational needs of Model Cities residents. The first issue of the newspaper, *New Day,* indicated that its purpose was:

> . . . to give us (residents) the information necessary to make intelligent decisions about the Model Cities program. To decide for ourselves what projects we want implemented we must have as much information as we can. The Model Cities newspaper will provide that information constantly and thoroughly. It will print material that commercial print and broadcast media simply cannot carry.[19]

Reader surveys and a press council were used to help evaluate the performance of the newspaper.

*Journalism Reviews.* Few journalism schools can take any credit for the burgeoning regional and national journalism reviews. A notable exception is Columbia University, which in 1961 launched the *Columbia Journalism Review,* a quarterly which has since expanded to six issues a year. "There were some lonely years at first," for James Boylan, its editor from 1961 to 1969, but there were payoffs, not the least of them the improvement of Columbia's instructional program. According to Boylan:

> In some ways, the Graduate School of Journalism is better, I believe, than if it had stuck to teaching alone. In a curious way, it has come to know the media more intimately and intensely than do most academic institutions, and I think that this knowledge is the fruit of the scrutiny provided by the *Columbia Journalism Review.*[20]

[18] Lawrence W. Lichty and William B. Blankenburg, "BTM v. WISC-TV: A Case of Adversary Research," paper presented at the annual convention of the Association for Education in Journalism, Carbondale, Illinois, August 1972. A shortened version appears in *Chicago Journalism Review,* October 1972, pp. 10-13.

[19] The writer is indebted to Professor Alfred Lorenz of Marquette University for this information.

[20] "*Columbia Journalism Review* at Home: The journalism school as a publisher," in "Criticisms of the Media in Journalism Education," *op. cit.,* note 1.

Other universities have published or helped sponsor similar publications: Southern Illinois University *(Grassroots Editor)*, New York University *(News Workshop)* and the University of Montana *(Montana Journalism Review)*. Most of them totter between starvation and bankruptcy. One, the *Review of Southern California Journalism* with editorial offices at California State University, Long Beach, receives financial support from area professional chapters of Sigma Delta Chi.[21]

Not all journalism reviews are printed. For example, the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee broadcasts a weekly radio series entitled "Milwaukee Media Review."

*Meeting with the Pros.* A vehicle for media evaluation easily overlooked is the meeting between journalism students and professors and local practitioners. Some newspapers have invited journalism instructors from nearby universities to meet with the newspaper staff and offer criticisms. Other examples could be cited. Loyal Gould of Wichita State University has reported on an evening course drawing non-university adults to the classroom, including some who attend for no credit because they find media criticism informative and stimulating.[22] Melvin Mencher of Columbia University has suggested that journalism schools could train staff members of the alternate media or provide pilot publications for people lacking access to the media.[23]

Other areas remain to be pursued. The self-protective syndrome, in vogue for so many years, has given way to a fuller understanding of what press responsibility and professionalism imply. In the absence of a public-based media lobby and in the interest of preventing government intervention, journalism educators are fashioning a role as intermediaries between the media and their publics and the media and government. The role, so far, is largely undefined but beginning to take shape.

[21] Alan Hensher, "Fair and Careful Watchdog on Sigma Delta Chi's Leash," *Editor and Publisher*, December 9, 1972, pp. 22, 24.

[22] "Meaning, Not Events." Comments made at a meeting of the Mass Communication and Society division of the Association for Education in Journalism, Carbondale, Illinois, August 22, 1972.

[23] "Criticisms of the Media in Journalism Education," *op. cit.*, note 1, p. 19. See also *Nieman Reports* (December 1972/March 1973), pp. 18-22.

# Criticism of the Media, With the Media

By David L. Anderson and Loren Ghiglione

In the past half dozen years, journalism educators have stopped watching media criticism from the sidelines and have leaped into the arena. In 1967, a colloquy marking the twentieth anniversary of the Hutchins Commission report emphasized the dangers and problems of a journalism educator taking on the role of critic.[1] A similar exchange in 1972 gave evidence that the question had changed to how, not whether, to play the role of media critic.[2]

It seems clearer today than it did in 1967 that, whether or not journalism educators are bold enough to discuss publicly how well the media serve society, other agencies are willing to do so. Journalism reviews—originally available only in major metropolitan centers—now chip away at the press' foibles in smaller cities such as Fairbanks, Alaska, and Santa Fe, New Mexico. Alternative media—for example, *The Village Voice* and *The Boston Phoenix*—cast a critical eye on their daily newspaper neighbors. Dailies such as the Washington *Post* and the Louisville *Courier-Journal & Times* each have created ombudsmen responsible to the publisher and the public for reporting on his newspaper's failings. And even public television, with its "Behind the Lines," and commercial television, with such shows as "Milwaukee Media Review," have gotten into the act.

[1] "The Hutchins Commission Revisited." Unpublished transcript of panel discussion presented to Association for Education in Journalism, University of Colorado, August 30, 1967.

[2] "Criticism of the Media in Journalism Education." Unpublished symposium presented to Association for Education in Journalism, Southern Illinois University, August 23, 1972.

The presumed pressures against journalism educators becoming critics appear to be exaggerated. In 1971, John L. Hulteng found almost 60 per cent of editors he polled favored "analysis" of press performance by journalism schools and departments.[3] Kenneth Starck has noted that publishers with whom he dealt as a press council moderator gradually moved away from defensiveness and toward receptivity to criticism regardless of its source.[4] Journalism educators participating in the New England Daily Newspaper Survey as evaluators ran into no special resistance from the newspaper people they interviewed.

A reasonable conclusion seems to be that, as editors and publishers become more familiar with the involvement of journalism educators in responsible media criticism, newspapers will become more receptive to journalism educators as critics.

*Avenues for Cooperation: State and Regional Surveys*

One method of media criticism open to journalism educators involves cooperative efforts with working journalists and other members of the journalism community. Perhaps the most ambitious example of this form of cooperative press evaluation is the New England Daily Newspaper Survey, just published as this monograph goes to press.[5] A critical study of the strengths and weaknesses of the more than 100 daily newspapers in six states, the survey is co-sponsored by the New England Daily Newspaper Association, the New England Society of Newspaper Editors and the Boston-based regional chapter of Sigma Delta Chi. The study was funded by a grant from the Markle Foundation of New York.

Of the 13 newspaper people serving as evaluators for the New England survey, three were journalism educators: Brooks Hamilton, professor, Department of Journalism, University of Maine; Melvin Mencher, associate professor, Graduate School of Journalism, Columbia University, and Alan Miller, chairman, Department of Journalism, University of Maine. Two more were teaching

[3] Quoted by Kenneth Starck, "Needed: Criticism from Within," *Grassroots Editor* (November/December 1972), p. 23.

[4] *Loc. cit.*

[5] Loren Ghiglione, ed., *Evaluating the Press: The New England Daily Newspaper Survey* (published by the editor, 25 Elm Street, Southbridge, Mass. 01550).

journalism on a visiting or adjunct basis: Ben H. Bagdikian at Syracuse and James Boylan of Columbia.

Four other journalism professors were involved from the start in planning and conducting the survey: two from the University of Massachusetts and one each from the University of Rhode Island and Boston University. An unusual feature of the educators' participation is that it also involved undergraduate journalism students at Massachusetts and Rhode Island. The students conducted independent research on demographic data and measured the space allocated in papers to the various categories of news and advertising. The students' results were included in the survey report.

Perhaps it is significant that the New England Daily Newspaper Survey was not organized by a journalism educator but by a working newspaper person who could claim until recently, despite his newspaper's history of involvement in media criticism, that "not one journalism professor has ever visited our paper."[6] A similar survey under consideration in Oregon is also the idea of working journalists.[7] While journalism educators have not aggressively pushed for the organization of on-going, systematic evaluations on a local or regional level, there is no reason they should not be the initiators of such grassroots surveys.[8]

*Avenues for Cooperation: Trade Associations*

Of course, the adversary relationship between educator and working journalist—which can be inferred from some of the preceding discussion—is not the only route open to the educator-critic. Journalism educators' opportunities for critical surveillance of media performance in conjunction with trade and professional groups, though rare until recently, are probably more numerous and varied than many faculty members realize.

Beyond the more obvious connections, such as journalism pro-

[6] Loren Ghiglione, "Self-Criticism and Suggestions for Some Help," in "Criticisms of the Media in Journalism Education," p. 39.

[7] Robert W. Chandler, Editor, *The Bulletin*, Bend, Oregon (personal communication to Loren Ghiglione, December 14, 1972).

[8] Two journalism educators, William L. Rivers and David M. Rubin, initiated a pioneering study, *A Region's Press: Anatomy of Newspapers in the San Francisco Bay Area* (Berkeley, California: Institute of Governmental Studies, University of California, Berkeley, 1971).

fessors serving as moderators of local press councils and contributing articles to local journalism reviews, other regional and national avenues are emerging.

A series of seminars and workshops, financed jointly by the Southern Newspaper Publishers Association Foundation and the Ford Foundation, has included sessions dealing directly or indirectly with press criticism and occasionally has involved journalism educators. At Oklahoma State University in 1971, for example, the quest for credibility occupied one such gathering. On another occasion the SNPA sponsored a discussion, involving media professionals and journalism-school chairmen and deans from throughout the South, entitled "Education for Newspaper Work," which was conducted at the University of South Carolina in 1972.[9] Here the tables were in part turned, with the journalists criticising journalism education.

The Poynter Fund, named for the St. Petersburg *Times* editor and publisher, gave $500,000 to Indiana University in 1972 to investigate the credibility of a number of social institutions, including communications media.

The American Newspaper Publishers Association Foundation shows signs of recognizing press criticism from educators as a part of its announced commitments to three goals: increased professionalism, better public understanding of a free press in America and more responsive and informed readers. In the autumn of 1973, the ANPA Foundation sponsored a conference on "The Future of Journalism Education: Its Problems and Challenges."[10] Among the conference papers was one on media criticism by Prof. James W. Carey of the University of Illinois.

Although it seems unlikely that the ANPA Foundation will ever become the cutting edge of a movement to finance public criticism of the publishers' own products, the foundation's "on-the-record" statements seem to leave little room for opposing the involvement of educators in press criticism as a matter of prin-

[9] Published as "Education for Newspaper Work" by the SNPA Foundation, Atlanta, Ga. (undated).

[10] "Education for Journalists in the Seventies and Beyond" (Washington: ANPA Foundation, 1973), a preliminary report, contains the text of all the prepared papers. See also Keith P. Sanders, "What Are Daily Newspapers Doing to Be Responsive to Readers' Criticisms? A Survey of U.S. Daily Newspaper Accountability Systems." (ANPA, 1973)

ciple. "The Foundation believes it must assume a leadership role in helping newspapers strengthen public understanding of a free press," says David K. Gottlieb, a trustee of the ANPA Foundation Endowment Program, "and to preserve a level of confidence in the press which is vital to the public interest."

Another organization worthy of consideration by the educator-critic is the American Press Institute, which describes itself as "a non-profit working center dedicated to the continuing education and training of daily newspaper men and women." The Institute's two-week sessions—conducted for editorial-page editors and writers, investigative reporters, sports editors and a dozen other categories of newspaper personnel—permit repeated opportunities for criticism of the participating newspapers.

Until three years ago, API workshop enrollments had been restricted to members of the press. But in the course of a review of its 25 years of operation, the Institute's directors decided to expand eligibility to deans and faculty members of journalism schools. Walter Everett, API's executive director, describes the purpose of the change as one of "producing a better mix and exchange between the front-line newspapermen and journalism educators." Subsequently, three educators have participated in various workshops. John L. Hulteng of Oregon attended an editorial-page editors and writers' seminar, David McHam of Baylor took part in a city editors' seminar and Frank B. Senger of Michigan State was enrolled in a seminar for publishers and editors. Perhaps the frequency will increase when the new policy becomes better known, and, if it does, so will the frequency of academic involvement in the systematic exploration of newspaper performance. As Hulteng and Roy Paul Nelson have noted, the short-course approach adopted by various institutions, not just the API, has had a significant impact on performance, "even though relatively small numbers of newsmen have been directly affected."[11]

So times are changing. But what questions are suggested by these joint enterprises between media-related groups and journalism educators? What implications do they suggest for the future shape and direction of criticism of the media?

[11] *The Fourth Estate: An Informal Appraisal of the News and Opinion Media* (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), p. 336.

Surely one of the most important questions must be whether the journalism educator has anything to offer to media criticism that cannot as well be obtained from working journalists or popular writers who specialize in press dissection.

Media criticism needs more than experienced news people with fond memories and a mind full of anecdotes from 40 years of desk work.[12] It needs more than good magazine writers and television commentators who can produce at will entertaining, titillating accounts of press goofs. If calls for people knowledgeable about the press who, nevertheless, can examine the press in a systematic and unhurried fashion from a position of independence. Kenneth Kenniston has spoken of people whose experience and temperament have produced "a critical view of the existing society that permits them to stand back from immediate pieties and verities . . ."[13] The academic community has more capability than other segments of society to study institutions—including the press—more deeply and over a wider scope "to attempt to understand not only the intricacies of some small microcosm, but the macrocosm . . ."[14]

This point made itself apparent at several stages in the New England Daily Newspaper Survey. First, journalism educators involved in planning the survey seemed more than their professional counterparts to view the project in a larger framework. They sought an evaluation procedure that would touch on a range of topics some editors and publishers tended to regard as not particularly relevant—for example, the policy of newspaper editors toward journalism reviews, and the judgments of reporters concerning performance of their own newspapers. It is clear that the educators' concerns broadened the scope of the survey and could broaden and deepen future surveys.

Second, educators showed greater concern for the underdog. They were interested—as were many newspaper people—in seeing the survey answer such questions as how papers are responding to the needs and fears of minority groups, and employment prac-

[12] See Melvin Mencher, "A Failure of Verve and Nerve," in "Criticisms of the Media in Journalism Education," p. 20. Also, *Nieman Reports* (December 1972/March 1973).

[13] *Youth and Dissent: The Rise of a New Opposition* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1971), pp. 134-7.

[14] *Ibid.*, p. 138.

tices among the region's dailies regarding women, blacks and persons with Spanish surnames.

Third, the educators who acted as evaluators for the New England survey appeared to find it easier than working journalists —many of them now retired—to produce a critical, questioning view of newspaper performance. No doubt there is a tendency on the part of working journalists to sympathize with the forces that make life difficult for editors and reporters—deadline pressures, understaffing, small budgets, and the like. But educators also seemed to find it easier—perhaps because of training or because of their regular contact with students—to challenge long-standing newspaper practices and to discuss the often confusing and conflicting attitudes that make up a newspaper's policy.

Another major question stemming from recent attempts at organized criticism is whether the scope of such studies should be local, state and regional, or national.

"What we really need," Ben Bagdikian once observed, is "something tangible and significant for the reader in his own locality . . . an assessment of his own newspaper as he sees it." Unless he lives in New York, for example, "he really doesn't care much about the New York *Times'* performance . . . He wants to know how *his* paper is doing."[15]

The attacks on the Twentieth Century Fund's proposal for a national news council also are revealing.[16] One basis for the attacks seems to be the national scope of the proposed council—a feeling that criticism in one's own bailiwick is more functional from the standpoint of the consumer.[17]

Finally, one is compelled to ask what value journalism educators will attach to the professional activities that are involved in media criticism. Will an educator's career be advanced as much by his creation of a local press council as by the publication of his research article in *Journalism Quarterly?* Will he be encouraged to develop a course for his students that has as its central focus the evaluation of the region's press? Will he be rewarded by the journalism education community—in terms of promotions, prestige and pay—

[15] Bagdikian, "The Hutchins Commission Revisited," *op. cit.*, p. 18.

[16] For example, see Erwin Kroll, "Who Needs It?" *The Progressive,* March 1973, p. 35.

[17] See, for example, Ian Menzies, "Do the News Media Need a Watchdog?" *The Boston Globe,* March 20, 1973, p. 27.

for developing and sustaining arm's-length but working relationships with press organizations that help make possible projects such as the New England Daily Newspaper Survey?

The answers to these questions are important. Not all elements of the press community can be expected to approve of media evaluators, whether journalism educators or working newspaper people. For example, William Loeb's Manchester (N.H.) *Union-Leader* and *New Hampshire Sunday News* responded to the announcement of the New England Daily Newspaper Survey with two editorials, the first declaring the survey a "Kangaroo Court . . . sticking its nose into other people's business." Except for courts in cases of libel, "the only appropriate 'evaluators' of a newspaper's performance are its readers."[18] A second editorial, three days later, attacked the survey because one of the evaluators was once editor of the Portsmouth (N.H.) *Herald* who, said the editorial, has defended "pornography in student publications at the state university" and "publication of outright obscenity," as well as "a filthy novel authored by an editor in the university's public relations office."[19]

Clearly the journalism educators who venture into media criticism must expect an unfriendly, Loeb-like word now and then. But they also must remember the reason why, whatever the opposition, they must succeed in involving journalism education in media criticism.

First, journalism students—those who will be life-long consumers of news as well as tomorrow's reporters and editors—must be equipped with the tools to evaluate the performance of the media. If students do not obtain these tools, then journalism education will have failed to justify its existence. "For only thus," Jay Jensen wrote 14 years ago, "may students be expected to pass from college into their period of technical apprenticeship with their critical faculties already honed and practiced in connecting fact with theory, values with action, ideals with reality, and the demands of life with its possibilities."[20]

[18] " 'Evaluating' Freedom," *New Hampshire Sunday News*, January 7, 1973, p. 32.

[19] "Evaluating the Evaluator," Manchester *Union-Leader*, January 10, 1973, p. 15.

[20] "A Method and a Perspective for Criticism of the Mass Media," *Journalism Quarterly*, 37:262 (Spring 1960).

Second, media criticism today is taking place, as far as the public is concerned, amidst a dogfight—the press versus the government. Both sides use the language of war. News people talk of the "administration's assault on the press" and label it "a great dish of overblown rhetoric lavishly seasoned with bull."[21] And Nixon Administration spokesmen argue that the national news media are conspiring to fill the country with "elitist gossip" and liberal "plugola."[22]

From both camps, the rhetoric and the reasoning sometimes lose sight of reality. Journalism educators—as experts who are not tied to either camp—are in an ideal position to influence the public debate over the role of the press. What standards should apply to the news media? How do you translate such abstractions as fairness and objectivity into concrete guidelines for evaluating press performance?

Third, media criticism is an evolving art form and, at this very moment, the resources of journalism educators are crucial to this evolution. Media criticism has been dominated in the past by the personal essayist—whether he be an early mudslinger of the Upton Sinclair-Silas Bent school or an entertainer-writer such as A. J. Liebling. But media criticism is becoming, by necessity, more systematic, more complex and more institutionalized. The new media criticism costs big money, the kind of money that foundations are increasingly willing to give out and that journalism schools (but not newspapers, press associations or even most journalism reviews) are qualified to accept under Section 501 (*c*)(3) of the tax code. The new criticism requires great quantities of research, the kind of research that journalism educators and their students are best equipped to generate. This criticism also requires a continuity in the review of the press—not the hit-and-run approach of the personal essayist—that can best be provided in an effective manner by a journalism school. Such an institution can develop data year-to-year, establish computer systems for information storage and retrieval, and maintain contact with reporters, editors and publishers throughout the region.

The potential for cooperative projects that pool the resources

[21] Joe Spear, associate to Jack Anderson, as quoted in *The Quill* (April 1973), p. 6.

[22] "Nixon and the Media," *Newsweek*, January 15, 1973, p. 42.

of journalism schools and press organizations is great and some press organizations are aware of it. For example, the Continuing Studies Committee of the National Conference of Editorial Writers, which was created in 1970 to report on "problems concerned with the quality of opinion writing and presentation," recommended in 1973 that journalism educators be included in future committees. They, the Continuing Studies Committee concluded, "could provide valuable expertise and background, and journalism students might conceivably be enlisted to help carry out surveys and other research related to committee studies."

However, some press organizations are likely to give media evaluation such a low priority that it never takes place. These organizations can be coaxed—through the encouragement and cooperation of area journalism schools—into self-examinations that are likely to have more of an impact on the papers' performance than criticism that comes solely from outsiders, whether the outsiders be members of a press council or writers for a journalism review.[23]

Journalism schools' cooperative efforts with the press and its organizations may have greater potential for reforming newspapers than more glamorous forms of media criticism. Editors and publishers are more likely to respond constructively to criticism if they are not made to feel that, in so doing, they are betraying the ethos of their professional peers, their own communities and the imperatives of self-interest. So local or regional programs that pool the resources and talents of press organizations and journalism educators can be important instruments of change. For that reason alone, such cooperative programs deserve greater attention from journalism educators.

[23] See L. Erwin Atwood and Kenneth Starck, "Effects of Community Press Councils: Real and Imagined," *Journalism Quarterly*, 49:230-38 (Summer 1972).

# Summary and Conclusions

DESPITE a past reluctance on the part of journalism education and educators to engage actively in assessing media performance, the evidence presented here suggests a change is taking place, in the classroom, in the community and in working with the news media. Yet these efforts remain scattered and centered in a few institutions or a few individuals.

The preceding pages could be summarized as follows:

1) The journalism educator can and should participate in criticism of the news media in the classroom, in the community and in concert with the news media. The criticism may range from instruction in the writing of a lead to a large regional survey. Implicit in this critical role is the responsibility for defining, nurturing and defending concepts of freedom of information and freedom of the press.

2) The particular strengths of the academic community, in its perspective, interdisciplinary resources and research traditions, are neither substitutes for nor antagonistic to other forms of media criticism and review. Rather, the work of the educator-critic can supplement other forms of media review, as well as provide systematic and theoretical approaches to the study of the news media. The absence of such scholarly criticism is inconsistent with the nature of the relationship between professions and professional schools.

3) The record of journalism educators in media criticism has not been impressive.

4) The record of the past few years, however, suggests that journalism education is becoming more involved in criticism of the news media. Whether the educators are mainly influenced by the "spirit of the time" and the varied games of "beat the press" played by politicians, or because educators are beginning to recognize greater opportunities and responsibilities, this evolving critical role seems almost certain to continue and to become

institutionalized within the schools and departments of journalism and their national organizations.

It remains, however, for the journalism educator to assert himself and to secure representation in areas previously closed to him. The experience and relative success of journalism educators in working with local and regional media councils argues that they must share responsibility for national councils where they can contribute the same insights and leadership as on the local scene. Of course local media councils have more direct impact on media audiences and audience-media relationships.

Meanwhile journalism educators should be collecting and analyzing existing data on media criticism. A collection and retrieval system similar to the Freedom of Information Center at the University of Missouri would be an important step in establishing a tradition of media criticism in journalism education.

The resources for achieving many of the suggestions in this monograph have been available to journalism education for a long time. On a national basis, impetus for maintaining a tradition of media criticism falls naturally on the AEJ Committee on Professional Freedom and Responsibility and, through it, the various divisions of the AEJ and related associations.

This is no call for a "crash" program. This monograph shows that something is being done, that criticism of the news media can be expected to grow and flourish. But it will require far wider participation by journalism educators if the job is to be done.

## A Selected Bibliography

This bibliography was compiled to provide a list of periodicals related to the subject matter of the monograph, media reviews and a selection of significant and relatively recent works dealing with the news media. For additional or historical material, the reader is referred to *The Literature of Journalism* by Warren C. Price; "Performance of the American Press; a Half-Century of Appraisals," by Curtis D. MacDougall, June 1972, *CHOICE,* and to the bibliographies and indices of the items cited below.

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The following list is based on information from the Freedom of Information Center (University of Missouri), *Columbia Journalism Review* and miscellaneous sources.

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*Cervi's Rocky Mountain Journal,* 1326 Delaware Street, Denver, Colo. 80204.

*The Chapel Hill Weekly,* Chapel Hill, N. C. 27514.

*Chicago Journalism Review,* 11 East Hubbard Street, Chicago 60611.

*The Colonial Times,* Box 21026, Washington, D. C. 20009.

*Columbia Journalism Review,* 700 Journalism Building, Columbia University, New York 10027.

*Content,* 892 Sherbrooke Street, West Montreal 110, Ontario, Canada.

*Countermedia: Alaska Journalism Review and Supplement,* Box 2299, Fairbanks, Alaska.

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*Hawaii Journalism Review,* 603 Koko Isle Circle, Honolulu, 96821.

*High Country News,* 259 Main Street, Lander, Wyo. 82520.

*Houston Journalism Review,* Box 52691, Houston, Texas 77052.

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*Journalism Review,* Association of Professional Journalists (Sigma Delta Chi), 2121 North Street NW, Washington, D. C. 20037.

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*Pacific Sun,* 1070 Bryant Street, San Rafael, Calif. 94903.

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